

Adolescent Literature in the Classroom

An Honors Creative Project (HONRS 499)

by

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## Abstract

This creative project is compiled in the form of a guide that can be used to assist the teacher in selecting adolescent novels to use in the classroom. I created the first half of the guide, which includes plot summaries, reviews, and lesson plan ideas, and I compiled the information in the second half of the guide, which includes author information and reviews, from other sources.

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## **Rationale**

Many teachers do not take advantage of the significant amount of well-written literature for adolescents in existence today. This is usually because they do not believe it is of high quality or because they do not think they have enough time to read it, but the opposite is actually true. An adult reader can finish reading an adolescent novel in approximately four hours, depending on its length and level of difficulty. Like any branch of literature, not all of it is worthy of classroom use, but a large percentage of adolescent literature addresses important issues for adolescents such as peer pressure, drinking, dating, and racism and does so in ways that the adolescent is likely to take seriously.

Familiarity with adolescent literature assists the English teacher in particular. It gives the teacher the ability to recommend novels to avid readers as well as reluctant readers, and it helps the teacher to create interesting and age appropriate lessons, and to motivate the student to read and to learn. The purpose of this honors project is to help me, as a future English teacher, begin to attain this beneficial familiarity with adolescent literature.

Simply reading some adolescent novels would not result in a project appropriate for the Honors College. There would be no tangible evidence that the novels were read and, over time, I would not be able to remember their contents. Therefore, the bulk of the project focuses upon the creation of a guide that can be referred to in the future when I am actually teaching adolescents. The guide includes plot summaries, book reviews (written by me and collected from other sources), lesson plan ideas, author information, and a reflection.

Practically speaking, it would not be possible to attain the most beneficial level of familiarity over the period of just one semester, so it is necessary to narrow the focus of the project. In order to be prepared to meet the needs of a varied student population, the novels chosen for the project come from many different genres, including but not limited to realistic fiction, science fiction, and historic fiction. The novels are organized by genre within the guide and ten different novels have been included in the project.

The plot summaries and book reviews (both the ones written by me and those from other sources) serve several functions. The obvious one is to prove that the novels have actually been read. In the future, they will remind me of the contents of the novels, and students will be able to use them to help them in choose reading selections. Writing and reading the reviews helped me to discover criteria for a good novel and to see what kinds of requirements other people have. Going through this process of developing criteria in turn will allow me to help my future students learn what the elements of a good story are because I will use the experience to help me to teach others to do the same. In fact, the reflection included at the end of the guide focuses mainly upon the criteria that I developed for a good novel.

One of the most useful and practical parts of the project is the generation of the lesson plan ideas. The creation of lesson plans is a vital part of a teacher's job. The more ideas a teacher has to choose from when planning a lesson, the stronger the likelihood that he or she will be able to find ideas and then create a lesson which meets the needs of his/her students. The generation of the ideas for this guide was good practice, and later when I am actually teaching, the ideas in this guide will save me some valuable time

because I may be able to skip a significant portion of the brainstorming step in lesson planning.

Reading a selection with knowledge of the author in mind can make the selection much more interesting and it can increase the motivation to read it. Including author information in the guide will make it possible to share the information with students and increase the chance that the student will be motivated to read. This information will be especially useful when dealing with reluctant readers.

I hope that this project will be one that I will continue to make additions to on my own even after I have submitted it to the Honors College. The creation of this guide was of great benefit to me as a future teacher of adolescents. It allowed me to expand my knowledge of the resources available to me as an English teacher, especially my knowledge of authors and reading selections.

# **Plot Summaries, Reviews, and Lesson Plan Ideas**

**Title:** *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*

**Author:** Chris Crutcher

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Possible Grade Levels:** 7-10

**Plot Summary:**

Eric “Moby” Calhoun’s good friend Sarah Byrnes is in the hospital because she is not speaking or responding to anyone. The two became friends in middle school because they were both outcasts. Eric was incredibly overweight and consequently had no confidence and Sarah Byrnes’s face was horribly scarred from a controversial accident that occurred when she was only three years old. People were uncomfortable when looking at either of them, and so they befriended each other.

After middle school, Eric and Sarah Byrnes (she always insisted that people call her by her full name so that they would not crack a joke about her ironic name) start to grow apart. Eric befriends one of his teachers, Lemry, an English teacher and the swim coach. Eric joins the team and practice takes up a great deal of his time. But, when Sarah goes to the hospital, Eric is seriously bothered by it because she is the strongest, albeit sarcastic, person that he knows. He visits her every day and is determined to jar her into speaking to find out what is wrong.

Eric talks about Sarah Byrnes in his controversial Contemporary American Thought Class, taught by Lemry, and enlists the help of another fellow outcast, Dale Thorton, his new friend Ellerby, and Lemry. He eventually finds out the real story behinds Sarah Byrnes’s accident and helps her to escape from her abusive father and find a new family.

**Review:**

*Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* is an excellent example of the benefits of writing in first person. The reader immediately feels a connection with the narrator, from the very first page when Eric introduces himself to the reader in a friendly manner. The book reads like a conversation with the narrator, who is a well-developed character. He has a nice balance of faults and strengths with his fears, concerns, ambitions, and loyalty.

The other characters are also far from being flat. Even the minor characters, as secondary as they may be, have balanced characteristics. Eric’s mother’s boyfriend, for example, even though he only shows up in the novel a few times, is not just some man that hangs around the house and makes Eric uncomfortable. He has a past, a father who committed suicide, and an extreme hatred of child abuse.

The novel does contain some controversial material. Eric’s mom has an intimate relationship with a man she is not married to. Eric’s girlfriend had an abortion during a previous relationship. The Contemporary American Thought class gets into some heavy debates about religion and morals. In fact, the class is suspended because one of its members attempts to commit suicide. Like most adolescent novels with controversial material, the content is realistic, and many young people really do need to think about the issues it addresses. The actions advocated by the protagonist may not be agreeable to all

of the novel's potential readers, but most readers will probably enjoy the novel's treatment of some difficult issues and appreciate that it does not try to disguise reality.

### **Lesson Plan Ideas:**

#### Reading:

- Before reading the novel, students speculate on what the title could mean and what the novel could be about
- Students keep a journal while reading the novel and write their responses to the reading and make predictions.

#### Writing:

- Students write a personal narrative about a sport, hobby or interest, modeling the essay after Eric's account of swim practice.
- Students write a character study of Eric, Sarah, Ellerby, or Dale.

#### Speaking/Listening:

- Students go to a swim meet and then give a brief account to the class, comparing it to the way Eric describes practice.
- Students listen to a guest speaker talk about child abuse.

#### Viewing/Visually Representing:

- Students keep track of the plot (climax, conclusion, etc.) and then create a graph to represent it.



**Title:** *Hoops*

**Author:** Walter Dean Myers

**Genre:** Realistic Fiction

**Possible Grade Levels:** 7-9

**Plot Summary:**

Lonnie, who is just out of high school, is an excellent basketball player, but his lack of plans for the future are insuring that he is going nowhere fast. He grew up in a rough neighborhood without a father and his relationship with his mother is pretty shaky because of his desire for independence.

The two things Lonnie does care about are playing basketball and his friends. When word get around that there is going to be a large scale basketball tournament with college scouts involved, Lonnie and his friends decide to enter and end up being coached by a former NBA player named Cal. Lonnie does not trust Cal because the first time he saw Cal he was drunk and lying in the middle of an outdoor basketball court, but the two eventually find that have a lot to teach each other about friendship and responsibility.

**Review:**

*Hoops* is well written and accurate, but it is also severe. The characters' complexity and the realistic sources of their motivation in this novel make them come to life. Lonnie's stubbornness and anger are consequences of the difficult life he has led, while his concern for his girlfriend reveals that he has the capacity for love, even if he cannot admit it. It is not surprising that Cal became overwhelmed by the money and power he found when he was a professional basketball player, considering the fact that he grew up with very little of both. He struggles to become a better person and leave corruption behind, but it is so much a part of him that he can't let it go.

It is possible to understand the motivation behind the character's actions, but at the same time it is very difficult to accept them. The content of this novel is a rough reminder of the harsh and dangerous situations people with little money (and sometimes others with a great deal of money) find themselves in. Lonnie steals, gets into fights, drinks, and has sex. Cal was expelled from the NBA for getting involved with gamblers and shaving points off of games. His association with them eventually gets him killed. All of these things really do happen to people, but being inside the head of a person who is doing them is not an easy experience.

If you are searching for a story which is a light read or for an escape, then *Hoops* is not what you are looking for. On the other hand, if you desire a novel that will give you a glimpse of understanding into what it is like to live in a difficult, urban, and poor world, and to struggle to overcome its influences, then this is what you are looking for.

**Lesson Plan Ideas:**

Reading:

Students write a journal as they read the novel. Some possible topics include:

-Why does Lonnie have such a difficult time with authority figures?

- What options does Lonnie have for the future?
- Is Lonnie prejudiced and why?
- Is Cal a good basketball coach? Is he trustworthy?
- Will Lonnie learn from Cal's mistakes?
- What are some reasons that Myers may have wanted to write this novel?

Writing:

- Students will write a newspaper article about the basketball tournament and Lonnie's team.
- Students will write a poem about one of the issues the novel brings up that they have had experience with or are interested in, such as apathy, responsibility, poverty, racism, relationships between parents and teens, or some other pertinent topic.

Speaking/Listening:

- Using a video camera, students will recreate one of the scenes from the novel.
- Students listen to a number of sound effects compiled by the teacher and list scenes from the novel for which the sound effects would be appropriate

Viewing/Visually Representing:

- Students will watch a movie which portrays the struggles of an athlete (*Hoop Dreams*, *Rudy*, etc.), and compare the two stories.

**Title:** *Rats Saw God*  
**Author:** Rob Thomas  
**Genre:** Realistic fiction/Diary novel  
**Possible Grade Levels:** 8-10

**Plot Summary:**

*Rats Saw God* follows Steve York through his high school career in a rather unusual way. It is Steve's account of how he came to understand and accept himself and his family. The novel moves back and forth between the beginning and end of Steve's time at high school. The present, Steve's senior year, is being told to the reader, while the past is being written by Steve as a school assignment designed to take the place of an English credit so that Steve can graduate on time.

In the present, Steve is in trouble. He gets high off drugs, skips his classes, and is in danger of not graduating. Legally, his father is his guardian, but he has just run away from home and showed up unannounced at the home of his mother and sister and stepfather. His parents have allowed him to stay and finish high school while living with his mother. The past tells the story of how he got there. Steve writes about the friends, the girlfriend, and difficulties in getting along with his father that caused him to start behaving destructively and to eventually run away.

As he writes about his past, Steve continues to live in the present. He gets over the loss of his old girlfriend by finding a new one, tries to stop taking drugs, and discovers that both of his parents are only human. The change of living with his mother is good for Steve. It distances him from the sources of his problems and allows him to solve them more objectively.

**Review:**

*Rats Saw God* is a novel that adolescents should read because it explains what can cause a person to turn to taking drugs and participating in destructive behavior, and it also shows how a person can get his or her life back on track. The things that happen to Steve could easily happen to any high school student, like Steve's initially innocent but eventually unhealthy relationship with his girlfriend, his experimentation with alcohol and drugs, and the way he misunderstands his parents. An adolescent reader can identify with what Steve goes through and at the same time learn from his mistakes. Steve's account of the destructive things he does is far from glamorous. He has to face the consequences of his actions by having to live with his mother when he has reason to think she had an affair, and almost not graduating from high school. But, the novel does not depress the reader, because Steve is able to mature, form a better relationship with his father, and go to college.

The portrayal of Steve's actions is not graphic, and he does things that many other high school students have done, but not everyone may find this novel acceptable reading material. This novel is for older, more mature adolescents. Younger readers or their parents may object to some of the novel's content because of Steve's experimentation with alcohol, drugs, and sex.

### **Lesson Plan Ideas:**

#### **Reading:**

- Before reading the novel, students write a response to the question, how would it make you feel if one of your parents was a minor celebrity?
- While reading the novel, students create several Venn diagrams, comparing and contrasting Steve and his dad, Steve and Dub, Steve and his sister, and Steve's two girlfriends.

#### **Writing:**

- Students write a memoir/personal experience essay, modeling the way Steve writes about his past
- Students learn to use library resources and then use them to write a paper about peer pressure, alcohol or drug use, coping with divorce, or some other issue that is related to the novel

#### **Speaking/Listening:**

- Some students (or a student) give a report about Rob Thomas, using his web site as the main source of information, and perhaps corresponding with him using his e-mail address
- Students give a speech that Steve might have given, had he been selected at his high school commencement

#### **Viewing/Visually Representing:**

- Students create their own version of cover art

**Title:** *NightJohn*

**Author:** Gary Paulsen

**Genre:** Historic fiction

**Possible Grade Levels:** 7-12

**Plot Summary:**

The first time young Sarny, a slave girl, saw John he was literally being run onto the plantation and his naked body was covered in scars. Wary and yet curious, she speaks up when John offers a trade for some tobacco; she has a little bit that she saved from her gardening chores for just such a purpose. In return for a "lip of tobacco," John offers to begin to teach Sarny how to read and write. Literacy is an incredibly dangerous and illegal skill for a slave to have, but the idea of reading and writing appeals to her and she Sarny agrees.

Sarny's mammy does not like the idea of her learning to read and write, and with good reason. Other slaves on the plantation have been whipped or had the dogs sent on them for lesser crimes. But, John and Sarny are insistent, and everything goes well until Sarny gets carried away one day and Waller, the plantation owner, catches her writing a word in the dirt. He hits her and kicks her in the stomach, but she isn't the one who really gets punished. Instead, Waller chains Mammy up to the wall of the spring house all day and plans to whip her because she won't tell him who is teaching Sarny to write. Waller makes everyone watch while he strips Mammy of her clothes, puts the horse's harness on her, and makes her drag the carriage while he whips her. The sight is too much for John and he confesses. He loses two of his toes for punishment.

John teaches Sarny one more letter and then he runs away. But, just as promised, he comes back and forms a school that meets in the middle of the night to teach more people to read and write. His students all call him NightJohn.

**Review:**

This novel's short length and simple language may give it the appearance of being appropriate for a fairly young audience, but its content is intended for a mature audience, one which is capable of handling some harsh, unfortunate realities. The life of a slave was tragic and Paulsen does not sentimentalize it.

Sarny's voice has an accent that people often mistake as a sign of slowness or ignorance. With this story, though, it makes sense that it would not be told with long fancy words because a slave girl would not have that kind of vocabulary. In fact, the straightforward, matter-of-fact voice Sarny uses to tell her difficult story makes her a trustworthy narrator. She does not embellish her tale.

*NightJohn* brings to life an unfortunate part of America's past. It reminds the reader that terrible things happen when men and women abuse power. Yet, the novel also leaves the reader with a sense of faith in the human spirit. Even when the consequences could be fatal, people will fight to make their lives a little bit better. And sometimes, like John and Sarny, they succeed.

### **Lesson Plan Ideas:**

#### **Reading:**

-Students keep a journal as they read the novel. Some possible topics to write about include:

- Would you have made the trade and agreed to learn how to read and write?
- Why do you think the author made the dedication to one of Jefferson's slaves?  
What did you think of it?
- What makes Mr. Waller so mean?
- Do you believe that this story could have really happened? Why (use evidence from the story and talk about writing conventions the author used)?

-Students read this novel in a unit along with other stories about slavery. Some slavery stories are *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, and slave narratives, like those by Harriet Tubman and Booker T. Washington

#### **Writing:**

- Students write a narrative from the point of view of a young child.
- Students write a dialogue between two of the characters that Sarny talks about and is not already written in the form of a dialogue.

#### **Speaking/Listening:**

- Students read sections of the book aloud to hear Sarny's accent and discuss the reactions they have when they hear different kinds of accents.
- Students listen to a recorded version of the novel (or a part of it) to hear a reader's interpretation of Sarny's voice and accent and to compare it to their own.

#### **Viewing/Visually Representing:**

- Students create collages about Sarny, including her possible appearance, her wishes, indications of the relationships she has with other people, her likes and dislikes, and any other character traits.

**Title:** *Out of the Dust*  
**Author:** Karen Hesse  
**Genre:** Historic fiction  
**Possible Grade Levels:** 6-9

**Plot Summary:**

The dust jacket of this book categorizes it as a novel, but it is actually a series of chronologically organized poems written from the point of a little girl named Billie Jo living in the Dust Bowl during the Depression. The novel opens with the anticipation of the birth of Billie Jo's brother. The family is not well off by most standards, and the farm is failing, but Billie Jo earns a little extra money by playing the piano. They have enough to get by and they look forward to the new addition to the family.

Things start to go down hill when a tragic accident kills Billie Jo's mother, and injures Billie Jo's hands. Billie Jo's father becomes distant and Billie Jo feels suffocated by the dust that daily invades their lives, getting into their eyes, and clothes, and food. She decides to run away and escape the dust, but soon finds that what she really wants is a home and family, and so she returns to where she belongs and reunites with her anxious and grateful father.

**Review:**

*Out of the Dust* is a Newbery Medal award winner, a very quick read, and a great story. Reading it is similar to reading a young girl's diary or poetry notebook. The poems are simple and straightforward, but they convey strong emotions, and each poem is full of clues about Billie Jo's life. The format lends itself to showing the reader what is happening instead of telling it, and it makes the reader feel like an insider in the story.

The themes are classic ones about family, belonging, and perseverance. Billie Jo learns some important life lessons about relying on and appreciating family, having a place to call home, and about perseverance in the face of difficulty. They may be common, but these themes are also ones that everyone can relate to. Reading about them makes a person feel good, and in the case of this novel, they bring a period of American history to life.

This novel is appropriate for a large audience. It is never overly graphic or violent, so younger audiences can read it, and relate to the young protagonist. Older audiences appreciate the story line because Billie Jo faces some adult problems, like a disability, poverty, and death.

**Lesson Plan Ideas:**

Reading

- Students read *NightJohn* (see review) in the same unit as this novel and compare the two novel's themes and traits
- Students read poems with everyday topics like "The Zen of Housework" by Al Zolynas or "The Red Wheelbarrow" by William Carlos Williams

Writing:

- Students write rewrite one of the events in the poem as it would be written in a prose narration (instead of in the form of poetry)
- Students write a poem about an event that happened to them that day

Speaking/Listening:

- Students read the story's poems aloud
- Students conduct fact-finding missions about the Depression and report them orally to the class
- Students listen to sounds of dust storms and/or strong wind (recorded from movies, TV, etc.) and write a descriptive paragraph

Viewing/Visually Representing:

- Students find pictures from magazines or the internet to represent the characters and the setting of the story



**Title:** *The Giver*

**Author:** Lois Lowry

**Genre:** Science-fiction

**Possible grade levels:** 6-8

**Plot Summary:**

Jonas lives in a strange world where everything is set up to perpetuate the protection and survival of the humans who inhabit it. People are assigned jobs, marriages are arranged according to personalities, children are assigned to family units (two children per family unit), and the time at which a child is considered old enough to take the next step to adulthood by dressing himself or riding a bicycle or taking part in some other activity is predetermined. If a person does not fit into the society for any reason, then he or she is “released,” or executed with a poisonous injection.

The people of this society never know pain or suffering, with one exception. Someone must pay the price for the ability to maintain this perfect society and that is the Receiver. When a new Receiver has been chosen, it is his (or her) job to receive every memory, both good and bad, from the former Receiver and to hold them so that he or she may be asked advice whenever the society considers making a change. The former Receiver then becomes the Giver. Jonas has been chosen to be the next Receiver.

Holding the memories is extremely difficult not only because they are rough on a person who has never experienced any violence or pain, but because they make the Receiver aware of all of the things his/her society misses out on, like seeing things in color, and experiencing true love. Jonas and the Giver decide that their society needs to know what they are missing and to share the burden of the memories. If a person with some of the memories leaves the society, then the memories are released into the society.

The Giver stays behind to help the society cope with the released memories, and Jonas runs away.

**Review:**

The setting, plot, and characters of this novel all work together to create a wonderful, thought provoking story. In the beginning of the novel, Lowry reveals just enough information about the novel’s strange society to make the reader want to continue to read and find out more. Later, the novel sustains the reader’s interest because the main character changes and adjusts to become more like a person who lives in our world today. Jonas becomes a sympathetic main character, particularly because his realistic emotions stand out in stark contrast to his straightforward, simple-minded family and friends who are products of the society in which they live.

*The Giver* does have one troubling element to it, and that is the ending. Its tone and style do not fit in with the rest of the novel. Most of the novel is written in a straightforward manner, but the ending is ambiguous and dream-like. Instead of leaving a sense of satisfaction, the ending leaves the reader in a state of confusion.

Even with its frustrating ending, *The Giver* is an excellent novel. It gives the reader an appreciation for the freedom that we have in our society to experience real

emotions and the opportunity we have to learn from difficult experiences without being completely overwhelmed by them.

### **Lesson Plan Ideas:**

#### Reading:

- Students read *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* by Ursula LeGuin and then write a compare/contrast essay. (For mature readers only)
- Students choose two words from every chapter that they do not understand, then look up their definitions, and after reading the novel the students have individualized vocabulary quizzes.

#### Writing:

- Students write some memories that they would want Jonas to have
- Students form groups and create travel pamphlets encouraging people to move to the society in the novel.

#### Speaking/Listening:

- Students have a debate over the advantages and disadvantages of Jonas's society
- Students listen to a recorded version of the novel (or just one section of it) and as they do so they draw an illustration and write down the sentences or phrases that led them to draw that illustration.

#### Viewing/Visually Representing:

- Students create tableaux of important scenes in the novel. Some scenes they may want to act out are the one where Jonas is skipped over and not immediately assigned an occupation, or the one where he lies to his parents for the first time.

**Title:** *A Gift of Magic*

**Author:** Lois Duncan

**Genre:** Fantasy

**Possible Grade Levels:** 5-8

**Plot Summary:**

Elizabeth Garrett has three rather unusual children. They have grown up in a series of hotel rooms all over the world, following their father, a foreign correspondent, as he was assigned to stories. Kirby, the youngest, is a gifted dancer, and Brendon, the youngest has a knack for hearing music. But, the most unusual child is Nancy. She seems to know things before they actually happen, and sometimes she can even read her family members' thoughts.

Elizabeth and her children have just moved to Florida, the place where she grew up. She could not live an unstable, unpredictable life anymore, and so she has gotten a divorce and moved her children to Florida in the hopes that they can live like normal people.

The change is hard for Nancy to adjust to. She has never attended a public school before, and she gets placed in a grade ahead of most people her age, so she has trouble making friends. As if that were not enough for her to worry about, Elizabeth, her mother, is getting involved with an old high school sweetheart (who is also the junior high principal), and her older sister Kirby is ignoring her because the only thing she can think about is dancing and moving away to a dance academy.

Things get even worse when a series of events lead Nancy to decide to hide her abilities and avoid ever using them again. But, when her brother Brendon gets himself into trouble and calls out to her, she uses her abilities to save him from drowning, and she decides that maybe her abilities are not such a bad thing to have after all, as long as she is careful about how she uses them.

**Review:**

This is an excellent book for a young reader of age 10 to 12. Most of the story focuses on Nancy, and she is at the right age and maturity level to interest readers of this age. She worries a great deal about being normal and fitting in, which is a common concern for young adolescents, and with the exception of the difficulties she runs into as a result of her unusual abilities, the problems she faces are ones that any person her age could face. Her parents are divorced and her mother is starting to be interested in someone else, she has trouble fitting in at school, and she doesn't think that adults can understand her problems.

This novel stands out from others because of the way it mixes up genres and points of view. It contains the setting of a realistic fiction story, and yet the people in it have some unusual abilities. The author writes about the events in the story as if they really happened and she wants the reader to believe that people really can have ESP. A large portion of the novel is written from Nancy's point of view, but a few of the chapters are written from Elizabeth, Kirby, or Brendon's point of view as well, and the Prologue and Epilogue are written in a distant third person. The changing of points of view is not ever a problem because it only happens at the beginning of a chapter, so it does not

confuse the reader. In fact, the varying point of view is an asset because the reader gets to know all sides of the story.

**Lesson Plan Ideas:**

Reading:

- Before reading the novel, students list the associations that they have when they hear about ESP
- Students keep track of the times that the novel changes point of view and the ways in which the author notifies the reader that it has changed

Writing:

- Students write a research paper about studies of children with ESP, ballet, or coping with divorce
- Students create a hyperlink document which has links to web sites about topics related to the novel

Speaking/Listening:

- Students create a radio play version of a scene from the novel
- Students create a sound track to go along with the novel

View/Visually Representing:

- Students watch a brief ballet performance or a video on ballet (to understand what Kirby spends her time doing)

**Title:** *The Ruby in the Smoke*

**Author:** Philip Pullman

**Genre:** Mystery

**Possible Grade Levels:** 6-8

**Plot Summary:**

Sixteen-year-old Sally Lockhart, a resident of Victorian London, is caught in the middle of two strange mysteries. The first one appears after her father is killed a shipwreck and she receives a note in unfamiliar handwriting:

SALI BEWARE OF THE SEVEN BLESSINGS  
MARCHBANKS WILL HELP  
CHATTUM  
BWARE DARLING

The second mystery begins several days later when Sally receives a letter from George Marchbanks, asking her to visit him. Their meeting is brief, but Marchbanks tells Sally that her life is in danger, and gives her a diary that will explain why. Unfortunately, leaving Sally with only a few loose sheets that fall out, the diary is stolen. All that Sally knows from her meeting with Marchbanks is that part of the reason she is in danger has something to do with a large ruby and that a vicious old woman is after her.

Sally receives help from quite a few new friends that she meets as a result of the mysteries. Jim, who works for her father's old shipping company, is the first friend she makes. He finds out that a man named Mr. Bedwell is being forced to stay at Holland's Lodgings (which is easy to do, since Mr. Bedwell is addicted to opium) and he has been talking about both Sally and the Seven Blessings. Sally meets another friend, Frederick, while leaving Marchbank's house. He and his sister Rosa run a photography shop with the help of a man named Trembler. When Sally needs a place to live, they immediately have her move in and she earns her room and board by organizing and keeping their financial records. Frederick helps her find Mr. Bedwell's brother and save Mr. Bedwell so that she can find out what he knows about the mysteries.

The link between the two mysteries is opium. It is the reason for her father's death and it helps her to find out who the old woman is. Sally finds out from Mr. Bedwell, who was on the same ship as Sally's father, that the Seven Blessings, a Chinese secret society, was forcing the ships in her father's company to transport opium and when Mr. Lockhart found out and wanted to stop them, he lost his life. An opium-induced memory helps Sally to figure out why she should have anything to do with the ruby, and with that knowledge she makes the woman tell her what really happened to the ruby and how they are both involved.

Sally rids herself of her association with the old woman by confronting her on a bridge with the ruby, and throwing it into the river. The woman goes mad and jumps into the river after it. A man from the Seven Blessings witnesses the scene and then kidnaps Sally, telling her that she must either go along with him overseas because he is impressed with her beauty and intelligence, or she can stay behind and he will kill her. Sally does not take either option, and instead shoots him with a gun she had in her handbag. She

informs the police of what happened, but the body disappears, and so Sally is free of both mysteries.

**Review:**

*The Ruby in the Smoke* is an interesting, but at times troublesome novel. Its complicated plot is achieved by the intertwining of the two separate mysteries. They keep the reader curious and interested, but at times they can be confusing because Sally does not know that there are two separate mysteries and so the reader cannot keep them straight. The setting of this novel is unusual for an adolescent novel, and yet it would be appealing to a person, particularly a female person, of this age because the different set of manners and expectations of the time tends to interest them. Sometimes the limitations upon females is frustrating to the reader, but in Sally's case, she finds many ways to avoid the limitations her society would normally put on her. The bothersome parts of the novel are the way the author tells the reader how the characters feel instead of showing it and the awkward transitions. Instead of just describing Sally's appearance and actions after she has fired a gun, the narrator tells the reader that Sally is thinking that she was stupid and wondering why she did it. The author overuses the writing technique of leaving space between scenes to indicate a transition and even with the extra spacing, the novel seems to move jarringly from one scene right into the next.

**Lesson Plan Ideas:**

Reading:

- Students highlight or write down the clues to the mysteries as they read the novel
- Students read the other books in the Sally Lockhart trilogy (*The Shadow in the North* and *The Tiger in the Well*) and write a paper about how the books tie together and techniques the author used to separate the story into three parts.

Writing:

- Students create notes about historic or other well known events in the form of the note that Sally received, creating alternative names for the people who caused the problem and the people who would be helpful
- Students write follow up stories to the newspaper articles that are in the novel

Speaking/Listening:

- Each student is assigned a character and the name of that character is taped to his or her back. The student asks other students yes or no questions to find out who he or she is supposed to be
- Students choose a character from the novel and other people ask them questions to find out who they are

Viewing/Visually Representing:

- Students read other peoples' reviews of the novel and summarize their findings in the form of a chart or graph

**Title:** *The Goats*

**Author:** Brock Cole

**Genre:** Survival

**Possible Grade Levels:** 7-9

**Plot summary:**

Howie and Laura are scapegoats. Every year at summer camp the Goats, one boy and one girl, are left stranded by other campers on an island overnight without any clothes. Howie and Laura are angry and embarrassed about the way their fellow campers have treated them, and so they decide to get revenge by disappearing from the camp. They find a large log and swim/float to the shore and break into one of the abandoned summer cabins. The cabin has a limited amount of food and some old clothes and serves as a shelter for the night, but they decide that they feel uncomfortable in the cabin and it would be too easy for the camp members to find them and make them go back to camp. They absolutely do not want to return. A phone call to Howie's parents is not possible because they are on an archeological expedition, and a call to Laura's mother is unsuccessful because Laura is too embarrassed to explain what has happened.

They decide to stay in the area surrounding the camp for the next few days until Laura's mother comes for parents' day, but things don't go as they plan. In order to avoid being found by one of the camp counselors, they get on a nearby bus which is full of kids going to another camp more than ten miles away. Without any opportunity to get off the bus, they have no choice but to go to the other camp.

It takes the boy and the girl a few days to finally find Laura's mother, who has been notified of their disappearance, but over those few days they find courage and strength that they never knew they had.

**Review:**

*The Goats* is for a limited audience. This novel is for a mature adolescent who is an immature reader. Adolescents would like it because they are concerned with fitting in and the story is about a couple kids who do not fit but are able to not only get revenge on the others who excluded them, but are also able to become stronger more likeable people. However, *The Goats* is not for every adolescent. The character motivation is weak, and so a sophisticated reader would not find it believable. Laura and Howie do have reasons for not wanting to go back to camp, but they do not seem strong enough to warrant them running away and Laura's mother frequently blames herself for her daughter's disappearance, but it is never clear what causes her to do so. Not every immature reader could handle this novel, either, because it contains some sexual content. The boy and the girl are without any clothes for a while and they do handle the situation in an appropriate manner, but reading about it is not for every adolescent. Only adolescents that have at least some degree of maturity could handle reading all of the content.

**Lesson Plan Ideas:**

Reading:

-Students take on the role of a censor as they read and re-write the parts of the novel that may be offensive (and write up rationales for their choices)

-Students keep track of the occasions when they find something in the novel difficult to believe and why it was not believable

Writing:

-Students write letters from Howie's point of view to his parents, explaining what has happened to him

-Students write a compare/contrast paper, comparing the camps in the novel with ones that they have attended

Speaking/Listening:

-Students role play and pretend to be Howie, Laura, their parents, or some camp officials, and either give an explanation of why they ran away or ask for one

-Students debate whether or not the novel is appropriate to be used in a school setting and discuss what age student should read the novel

Viewing/Visually Representing:

-Students draw an illustration for each chapter which represents that chapter (and write a couple of paragraphs explaining how it represents the chapter)



**Title:** *Indian Summer*  
**Author:** Barbara Girion  
**Genre:** Multicultural fiction  
**Possible Grade Levels:** 5-7

**Plot Summary:**

Joni McCord's family decides to spend the summer at Woodland Reservation, an Iroquois reservation located in the Northeastern United States, but Joni is not happy about it. She has to leave behind her friends and cancel her plans. Instead, she must go and live in a small cabin and share a room with Sarah Birdsong, the chief's daughter. Both girls are very ignorant of each other's life styles and attitudes, and have to learn about each other the hard way.

Joni is miserable at the reservation because she feels like an outsider. Sarah always seems to get defensive and insulted whenever she tries to talk to her, especially when she asks about her traditions. In addition, all of Sarah's friends are downright rude to Joni and they play pranks on her.

Sarah isn't that happy either. She feels threatened by having Joni's family move into her home because she is embarrassed about needing outside help (Joni's father is a doctor and has come to run a clinic for the summer). Sarah is also annoyed at having Joni's family live in her house because all of the outsiders she has met before have been very ignorant and made fun of her.

The two girls finally learn to get along and respect each other, and even have the beginnings of a friendship after they realize the reasons for each other's behavior towards each other. Joni sees firsthand, the kind of treatment Sarah receives off the reservation, and Sarah learns of the pranks that her friends have been playing on Joni.

**Review:**

The idea behind this novel is admirable. Racial and cultural ignorance frequently leads to conflict and it is an important issue that adolescents should read about. However, the approach that the novel takes is too simplified. The characters are too typical and predictable in their behavior and the character development is lacking. Sarah worries about her friends and fitting in, but not much else, while Joni is only concerned about people respecting her culture and not depending on outsiders. They don't feel strongly about anything else. The adults are even less developed. Joni's parents only express caring for their jobs and their children and Sarah's grandmother is a stereotype of an older Native American who tells stories and makes peace when people argue.

It appears as though the author of this novel started with and focused on the idea of two cultures getting to know and respect each other and then neglected developing the rest of the story elements. She was concerned with including accurate cultural information, and succeeded in that part, but the characters and plot could still use some work. This could have been a great novel in theory, but unfortunately, it was not written very well.

**Lesson Plan Ideas:**

Reading:

-Before reading the novel, students start making a KWL (Know, Want to know, and Learned) about the Iroquois

Writing:

- Students write a research paper about reservations of the present day Iroquois.
- Students write/correspond with students living on a reservation

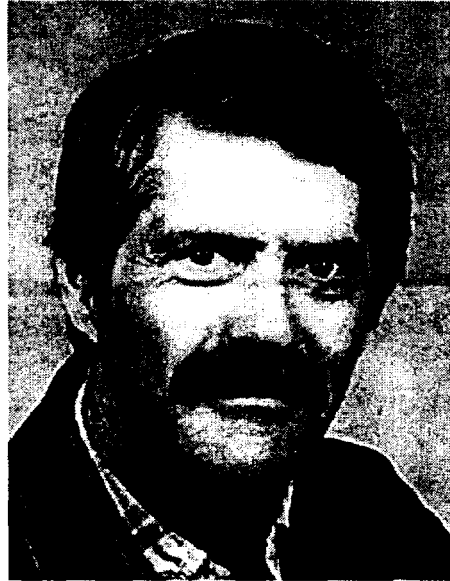
Speaking/Listening:

- Students tell stories using a bag of props like the grandmother in the story
- Students act out the scene where Joni tells her father bout taking Sarah's necklace, or where Sarah and Joni go to the store and get kicked out when a group of kids pick on Sarah
- Students listen to a story teller telling a fable

Viewing/Visually Representing:

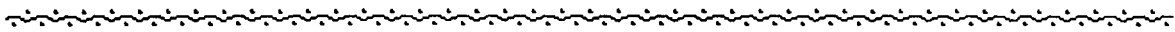
- Students create a map of Woodland Reservation

# **Author Information**



## LEARNING ABOUT CHRIS CRUTCHER

**Compiled by: Sue Cunfer, Ilene Lefkowitz and Wendy Pollock-Gillson with Kay E. Vandergrift in Young Adult Literature**



### BIOGRAPHY

Chris Crutcher was born on July, 17, 1946 in Cascade Idaho, which is small logging town in the mountains of west central Idaho. He is the middle of three children. Although his parents were both readers, Crutcher read only **To Kill a Mockingbird**, by Harper Lee in high school. Crutcher earned a B.A. degree in sociology and psychology from Eachster Washington State College, where he also spent much of his time swimming. He is a distance runner and swimmer; athletics appear throughout his works. Crutcher taught in an alternative school in California, returned to Spokane, Washington, where he worked as a child and family therapist, he is now a full time writer who works with the Child Protection Team in Spokane. Crutcher has never married and lives alone.

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**Stotan!.** New York: Greenwillow, 1986.  
**The Crazy Horse Electric Game.** New York: Greenwillow, 1987.  
**Athletic Shorts.** New York: Greenwillow, 1989.  
**Chinese Handcuffs.** New York: Greenwillow, 1989.  
**The Deep End.** New York: Morrow, 1992.  
**Staying Fat for Sarah Brynes.** New York: Greenwillow, 1993.  
**Ironman.** New York: Greenwillow, 1995.

### AWARDS AND HONORS

### **Ironman**

- o Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers 1996, (ALA)
- o Best Books for Young Adults 1996 (ALA)

### **Staying Fat for Sarah Brynes**

- o Best Books for Young Adults 1997
- o Best Book of the Year. (School Library Journal)

### **Athletic Shorts**

- o Best Books for Young Adult Readers 1992 (ALA)
- o Best of the Best in Young Adult Literature (School Library Journal)

### **Chinese Handcuffs**

- o Best Books for Young Adult Readers 1990. (ALA)

### **Crazy Horse Electric Game**

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### **Stotan!**

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### **Running Loose**

- o Best Books for Young Adult Readers 1983. (ALA)

### **The Deep End**

- o Best Book for Young Adult Readers (ALA)

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT CHRIS CRUTCHER CONTACT**

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## BOOK REVIEWS

### Athletic Shorts

Compiled by: Wendy Pollock-Gillson

#### Summary

Six short stories, which feature characters from previous Crutcher books, deal with several issues including AIDS, athletics, love, death, friendship, racism, and father-son relationships. The characters are drawn from **The Crazy Horse Electric Game**, **Running Loose**, and **Stotan!** They are quick reads (**Athletic Shorts** is 160 pages), aimed at grades 8 to 12.

Despite its YA rating, **Athletic Shorts** appeals to adult readers with its wit and willingness to address universal issues such as death. An example of his rye humor in *A Brief Moment in the Life of Angus Bethune*, is Angus' description of learning to dance in anticipation of being the Senior Winter Ball King,

"I went out and spent hard-earned money on dance lessons, dance lessons that sent not one but two petite, anorexic-looking rookie Arthur Murray girls off sharpening their typing skills to apply at Kelly Services. Those girls had some sore pods." From: Crutcher, **Athletic Shorts**. 11.

Death is featured in *The Time I Get and Goin' Fishing*, with sympathy for those left behind for example, Louie says to Darren in *The Time I Get*,

"You get angry that you didn't do every little thing just right when the person was alive, and you get angry at the person dying. It's crazy, I know, but you do. And sometimes you hate everybody in the world who isn't feeling as much pain as you are, and as much as anything you hate God, if you can still believe in Him, for not stepping up and fixing things." From: Crutcher, **Athletic Shorts**. 150.

#### Reviews:

**Booklist**. 88(4):428 October 15, 1991.

**Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books**. 45(4):87.

**Horn Book**. 62(5):602-03 September/October, 1991, (Starred).

**School Library Journal**. 37(9):278 September, 1991. (Starred).

**Voice of Youth Advocates**. 15(1): 26 April, 1992. (#5 quality, #4 popularity).

"As the title suggests, athletics are part of the selections; and Crutcher, as usual, is best at accurately portraying the world of high school teammates and coaches-readers can practically smell the sweat." From: Todd Morning review in **School Library Journal** Vol. (September, 1991): 278.

"The issues of father-son relationships, sexuality, and the testing of personal limits - all central themes in young adult literature- are explored from an unconventional

perspective in Athletic Shorts." From: **Horn Book**.

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## **Ironman**

**Compiled by: Sue Cunfer**

### **Summary**

**Ironman** is a heart warming book in which Bo Brewster struggles to deal with his relationships with a dictator-like father and an English teacher who takes pleasure in humiliating him. After an outburst in English class, Bo is forced to join the early morning Anger Management group with other students who need to work on their problems and control their anger. His reluctance to join the group changes over time as he bonds with the other group members who rally behind him as he trains for the Yukon Jack Triathlon.

Chris Crutcher's style is captivating as he tells the story through third person prose and Bo's first person unsent letters to Larry King. He developed Bo's character very well as his letters pour

"out his dreams, and his life story." From: O'Malley. **Booklist**. 1240.)

Crutcher also confronts the issue of homosexuality in his story as Bo learns that someone close to him is gay. The issue is handled well as Bo comes to terms with the news. Crutcher's characters seem too exaggerated at times, each with complicated lives, but he weaves them all into a well told story. A criticism of **Ironman** faults the book for reading too much like a television movie.

"And the bad guys are so bad." From: Gorman, **The New York Times Book Review**. (July 2, 1995): 13.

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## **Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes**

**Compiled by: Ilene Lefkowitz**

### **Summary**

**Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes** presents numerous themes that are popular with young adult authors today, but centers on the

"insidious and far reaching effects of child abuse." From: Vasilakis. 336. **Horn Book**. (May/June, 1993): 69.

Crutcher presents the other issues such as abortion, suicide, religion, family relationships and vigilante justice through assorted minor characters in such a way that they are neither sugar coated or preachy. Eric Callhoun, Moby as his friends know him, partly because of his physical appearance and partly because of his swimming talent is one of the main characters, the other is Sarah Byrnes,

"truly one of the ugliest human beings outside the circus. When she was three, . . . she pulled a pot of boiling spaghetti off the stove onto herself, leaving horrible burn scars. . . Her father, . . . allowed only the medical attention required to keep her out of danger. Almost nothing reconstructive was done." From: Crutcher. **Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes** 1993, p.

Together Sarah and Eric face the world and its cruelties until something inside Sarah snaps and she retreats into a world of silence. Eric must find the courage and the strength to understand Sarah's actions and to fight back for both of them.

The story is told in the first person through Eric's voice and thoughts. Once again, Crutcher has managed to do what he does so well, develop characters that we not only like but genuinely care about. Unlike many of Crutcher's books, this one features a very strong female (Sarah). There are no neat, happy predictable endings here. Just when you think you know what is going to happen, Crutcher throws you a curveball. Overall, it is an well rounded book that is an easy read and raises many thought provoking questions. Recommended for grades seven and up and sports enthusiasts of all ages.

"This type of novel is what many of today's YA s are looking for: sophisticated characters and plot, with a healthy sense of black humor." From: Lockwood, 218. **School Library Journal**. (March, 1993): 39.

### Reviews

Janice Del Negro. **Booklist**. Vol. 89 (1993): 1313.  
Deborah Stevenson. **Bulletin Center For Children's Books**. Vol. 46 (1993): 244.  
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## LINKS TO SPORTS WEBSITES OF INTEREST RELATED TO CRUTCHER STORIES

- Internet Public Library, Teen Division. Sports Section Cool links to sports information of all kinds, statistics, team pages, etc.
  - Sports Illustrated On-line. Need we say more? There is also a separate site for Sports Illustrated for Kids Online.
  - All the information, news, trades, statistics about the National Football League
  - The official homepage of the National Hockey League
  - Get the latest news, scores, stats on basketball and officially licensed NBA gear!
  - Not an official website for America's favorite pastime, but a great site for the baseball enthusiast. News, trades, stats, scores, etc. it's all here.
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## Other Books You Might Like After Reading Chris Crutcher

### Short Stories For Teens

Beattie, Ann. **Distortions**.  
Bernard, Robert, ed. **All Problems Are Simple and Other Stories**.  
Cormier, Robert. **Eight Plus One**.  
Gale, David, ed. **Funny You Should Ask: The Delcorte Book of Original Humorous Short Stories**.  
Gallo, Donald R., ed. **Connections**.  
Gingher, Marianne. **Teen Angel: And Other Stories of Young Love**.  
Gold, Ron, ed. **Stepping Stones**.  
Rylant, Cynthia. **A Couple of Kooks and Other Stories About Love**.  
Sieruta, Peter D. **Heatbeats and Other Stories**.



Updike, David. **Out on The Marsh.**  
Wilson, Budge. **The Leaving.**

## Teen Novels: The Issue is Gays and Lesbians

Block, Francesca Lia. **Weetzie Bat** and sequels.  
Garden, Nancy. **Annie on My Mind.**  
Hall, Richard. **Family Functions.**  
Holland, Isabelle. **The Man Without a Face.**  
Homes, A.M. **Jack.**  
Kerr, M.E. **Nightkites.**  
Klein, Norma. **My Life as a Body.**  
Koertge, Ron. **The Arizona Kid.**  
Shannon, George. **Unlived Affections.**  
Siman, Ken. **Pizza Face: Or, The Hero of Suburbia.**  
Sweeney, Joyce. **Face the Dragon.**  
Wersba, Barbara. **Crazy Vanilla.**

The above two lists are taken from: **Rip Roaring Reads for Reluctant Teen Readers.** Gale W. Sherman. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1993.



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## LEARNING ABOUT WALTER DEAN MYERS

Compiled by: Marilyn Fischer, Carol Levandowski, Carol Marlowe, and Barbara Snyder with Kay E. Vandergrift in the Young Adult Literature

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### BIOGRAPHY

Walter Dean Myers is a writer of children's and young adult literature. Walter Dean Myers was born in West Virginia in 1937 but spent most of his childhood and young adult life in Harlem. He was raised by foster parents and remembers a happy but tumultuous life while going through his own teen years. Suffering with a speech impediment, he cultivated a habit of writing poetry and short stories and acquired an early love of reading.

In 1954 he quit high school and joined the army. He later held many positions with various agencies including the New York State Department of Labor, the post office, a rehabilitation center and a transformer company. All during this time, Mr. Myers was writing for various magazines and periodicals. The turning point in his career came when he won a contest run by the Council on Interracial Books for Children with his book *Where Does a Day Go?* in 1969. Since then he has supported himself, his second wife, and four children with his very prolific writing in the area of children's and young adult literature. He volunteers at schools in Jersey City where he presently lives. He received his degree from Empire State College in 1984.

Myers explains his feeling for the young adult novel, "The special place of the young adult novel should be in its ability to address the needs of the reader to understand his or her relationships with the world, with each other, and with adults. The young adult novel often allows the reader to directly identify with a protagonist of similar interests and development." He is a compassionate, introspective person who believes, "It is this language of values which I

hope to bring to my books. . . . I want to bring values to those who have not been valued, and I want to etch those values in terms of the ideal. Young people need ideals which identify them, and their lives, as central . . . guideposts which tell them what they can be, should be, and indeed are."

Following his success with young adult literature, Meyer has branched out to include topics of nonfiction including black history with his recent *Now Is Your Time!* and *The Righteous Revenge of Artemis Bonner* an 1880's historical setting. Both have been received with much acclaim.

From: Walter Dean Myers 1994 "Margaret A. Edwards Award Acceptance Speech" *Journal of Youth Services in Libraries*. Vol. 8, No. 2 (Winter 1995): 129-133.

"Should whites write about blacks?" "Of course I feel you should write about anybody you want to write about, I couldn't care less who you write about. But what very often happens is that, when you're writing about a culture that's not your own, you may hit large areas of it, but there are so many areas that you miss."  
From: Roger Sutton. "Threads in Our Cultural Fabric," *School Library Journal*. Vol. 40, No. 6 (June 1994): 26.

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## AWARDS TO WALTER DEAN MYERS

- Where Does the Day Go?** Council on Interracial Books for Children Award, 1968 .
- The Dancers**. Child Study Association of America's Children's Books of the Year, 1972.
- Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff**. ALA Notable Books, 1975.
- Fast Sam, Cool Clyde and Stuff**. Woodward Park School Annual Book Award, 1976.
- It Ain't All for Nothin'**. ALA Notable Book Citation and ALA Best Books for Young Adults Citation, 1978.
- The Young Landlords**. ALA Notable Book Citation and ALA Best Books for Young Adults Citation, 1979.
- The Young Landlords**. Coretta Scott King Award for Fiction, 1980.
- The Legend of Tarik**. ALA Best Books for Young Adults Citation, 1981.
- Hoops**. ALA Best Books for Young Adults Citation, 1982.
- The Legend of Tarik**. Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies, National Council for Social Studies and the Children's Book Council, 1982.
- Hoops**. Edgar Allan Pie Award runner-up, 1982.
- Won't Know Till I Get There**. Parents' Choice Award, 1982.
- Tales of a Dead King**. New Jersey Institute of Technology Authors Award, 1983.
- The Outside Shot**. Parents' Choice Award, 1984.
- Motown and Didi**. Coretta Scott King Award for Fiction, 1985.
- Adventure in Granada**. Child Study Association of America's, 1987.
- Fallen Angels**. Coretta Scott King Award for Fiction, 1988.
- Fallen Angels and Scorpions**. ALA Best Books for Young Adults, 1988.
- Scorpions and Me, Mop, and the Moondance Kid**. ALA Notable Book Citation, 1988.
- Fallen Angels**. Parents' Choice Award, 1988.
- Scorpions**. Newbery Honor Book, 1989.
- The Mouse Rap**. IRA Children's Choice, 1991.
- Now is Your Time! The African-American Struggle for Freedom**. Coretta Scott King Award for

Nonfiction, 1992.

**Now is Your Time! The African-American Struggle for Freedom.** NCTE Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction, 1992

**Now is Your Time! The African-American Struggle for Freedom.** ALA Best Books for Young Adults and Notable Books for Children, 1992.

**Somewhere in the Darkness.** Boston Globe/Horn Book, 1992

**Somewhere in the Darkness.** Booklist Editors Choice, 1992.

**The Righteous Revenge of Artemis Bonner.** ALA Best Books for Young Adults, 1993.

**Somewhere in the Darkness.** Newbery Honor Book, 1993.

**Somewhere in the Darkness.** ALA Best Books for Young Adults, Notable Books for Children, 1993.

**Somewhere in the Darkness.** Coretta Scott King Award, 1993.

**Malcolm X.** Coretta Scott King Award for nonfiction, 1994.

**Malcolm X.** ALA Best Books for Young Adults, 1994.

**Malcolm X.** IRA Teachers' Choice, 1994.

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## CRITICISM FROM ALA LIST OF BANNED BOOKS

**Fallen Angels,** New York: Scholastic. Challenged in Ohio schools (1990) because of profane language.

**Fast Sam, Cool Clyde and Stuff.** New York: Viking, 1975. Challenged by school administrator (1983) in Ohio.

**Hoops.** New York: Dell. Challenged in Colorado (1989) school libraries.

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## REVIEWS AND CRITIQUES

### SCORPIONS

This section is written by Barbara Synder.

Jamal, a black young man, living in Harlem is struggling to handle the responsibilities of becoming a man within the conflicting environment of home, school and now membership in a gang, the Scorpions. His friendship with Tito is jeopardized by the circumstances surrounding his being forced to take a place with the Scorpions and the resultant possession of a gun and involvement with drugs. Tito says: "They look like they thrown-away people....that makes me scared, because I don't want to be no thrown-away guy." But for Jamal there is the question of the bail money for his brother, his Mother's anguish, his Father's wish for him to be a "man."

Strong characters and several subplots provide a superb, fast moving, suspenseful story. Told with variant English and some understandable "street language." Jamal's plight, rather than being depressing is amazingly upbeat, and you are sure - well almost sure- that he will draw on his rich background to survive. Walter Dean Myers draws an excellent picture of life in an urban city.

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### THE MOUSE RAP

This section is written by Carol Marlowe

Mouse as he is called by his friends (real name Frederick,) and his ace, Styx, along with Omega, Beverly and Sheri enjoy basketball and hangin', and the guys are even persuaded to join a

dance contest. This summer is even more special for these Harlem teens. Rumor has it there is a stash of cash hidden in an abandoned building by gangster Tiger Moran.

Sheri's Granddad worked as a mover, of course being black did not belong to Sudden Sam's, but he heard them talking. Sudden Sam is now living in a nursing home but joins the gang of Gramps, Mouse, Styx, Beverly, Sheri and Moran's Grandson, Booster, in the search for the treasure. At the end, the city has to get involved, but fame and wealth is bestowed upon the gang.

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**"While it's a cheerful, lively story, this is busier than most of Myers books and has so much going on that it's almost cluttered. It's also determinedly bouncy so that there is little contrast in the writing--amusing but as relentless as a rock video."**

From: **The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books**. June 1990, Volume 43, No10, p.248.

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## **MOTOWN AND DIDI: A LOVE STORY**

This section is written by Marilyn Fischer.

This is the story of two young adults living in Harlem. The female, Didi, yearns to go to college, but her mother is unable to afford this "luxury." Motown, the young man, works when possible but is homeless until Didi convinces him that he deserves better and finds him an apartment. Their relationship becomes more than friends, helping one another when they interact with a local drug lord who has gotten Didi's brother involved in his drug business. Both of these young people are searching for a way out of Harlem, both are smart enough to want better lives.

For junior and senior high school students, this story will touch, as well as entertain. There is action, as well as romance, but not so much of the latter as to be mushy. Instead it's more of a study of two sensitive teenagers fighting to survive in their environment.

Didi is also fighting to keep her family intact, her mother alive, and her brother free of the drug addiction which may soon destroy him. Motown is trying hard to educate himself and support himself at jobs that don't last long and are generally unpleasant and low paying.

**"the novel...makes a potent anti-drug statement."**

From: Nancy Hammond.**Horn Book**. March/April, 1985.

**"...strong, underlying anti-drug abuse message."**

From: Sally Estes found in **Booklist**. October1, 1984.

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## **THE GLORY FIELD**

This section is written by Carol Levandowski.

In this saga of an African American family, reminiscent of *Roots*, five generations are traced from the 1753 capture of Muhammad Bilal in Sierra Leone to the present experiences of two cousins in New York City.

Slavery, the Civil War and freedom are chronicled through the intervening generations of family members. Throughout this novel, the love of family is the foundation for each character's life.

"Each part of the story ends on a hopeful note, yet each is unfinished. Readers are left to wonder what happened to various people; sometimes an answer is provided, but more often not."

From: Carol Jones Collins *School Library Journal*. Vol.40, No. 11, (November 1994): 121-122.



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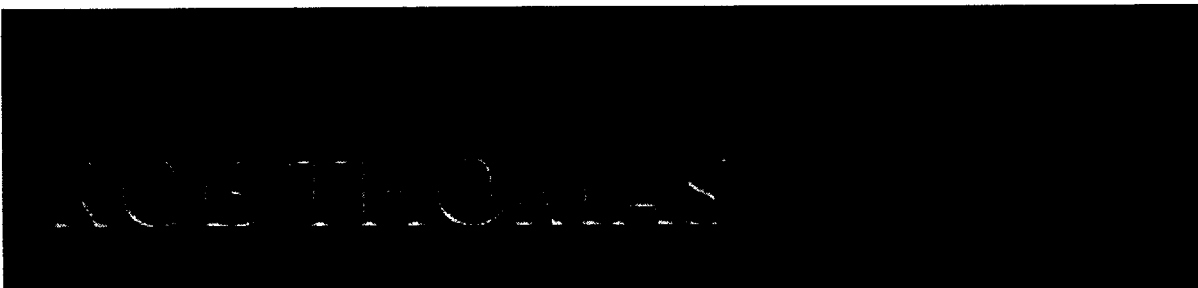
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*To send mail to [Kay E. Vandergrift](#)*

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*Created April 22, 1996, Last Updated September 14, 1996*





## Meet Rob Thomas

Rob Thomas lives in Los Angeles on the same Hollywood street where Hugh Grant was caught with Divine Brown.

Thomas is currently the executive producer and creator of the ABC television series "Cupid." Immediately upon becoming a television producer, Thomas installed a jacuzzi at his house and had his office couch Scotch-guarded. So far, these aphrodisiacal measures have borne no fruit. Thomas has, consequently, begun looking into rhinoplasty and BMW convertibles.

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### Books

Sometimes Thomas stands there all night, staring down at the lights of L.A. wondering if he can ever go home.

#### Movies

#### Music

#### Television

Thomas taught high school journalism for five years, advised the University of Texas student magazine, Utmost, and worked for Channel One, a Los Angeles-based television news show aimed at teenagers nationwide. Thomas has toured the country in several marginally talented rock bands. A practicing Renaissance man, his baseline fade-away has been described as Olajuwonesque. Thomas' lean prose style reflects a lifelong alphabetical stinginess also expressed in his personal relationships (his ex-girlfriend is named Ed, his father Bob), early rock influences (U2 and REM), favored musical instrument (bass), dominant basketball skill (D), and the names of his pet cocker spaniels (Owen and Everett, inevitably foreshortened as O and E).

And for you school kids doing book reports:

Place of birth: Sunnyside, WA

Date of birth: 8/15/65 (That makes him a Leo!)

Moved to Texas at age 10.

Graduated from San Marcos (TX) High School in 1983.

(The fact that he knows the lyrics to "The Kid Is Hot Tonight" and "The Stroke" is merely a function of the era in which he lived.)

Graduated from the University of Texas at Austin in 1987. (BA in History)

Bats: Right

Throws: Right

Thinks: Left

### **Career Highlights:**

June 1979 -- saw Styx in concert. Thought they kicked ass!

October 1979 -- returned an interception for a touchdown in freshman football game versus New Braunfels. Touchdown nullified for excessive celebration.

November 1980 -- "Caradoc," Thomas' eleventh level paladin, defeats the fire giants. Others help.

March 1982 -- botched one line as King Creon in high school production of Medea. "She did what?!"

March 1983 -- Severely sprained ankle in state basketball playoffs, an injury from which he has yet to mentally recover.

June 1984 -- bought a beat up six-string in a second-hand store, didn't know how to play it, but he knew for shore. Formed the band Public Bulletin with five high school buddies none of whom knew how to play instruments, either.

July 1984 -- Public Bulletin prints band t-shirts.

September 1984 -- As a TCU Horned Frog, Thomas intercepts a fake punt attempt against Kansas State. Newspapers across the state attribute the interception to all-conference cornerback SEAN Thomas. ROB Thomas quits football and transfers to the University of Texas.

February 1986 -- arrested in anti-apartheid demonstration on the University of Texas campus.

Series of embarrassingly earnest political songs soon follow.

January 1988 -- band gets new singer/guitar player, renames itself Hey Zeus in honor of the youth minister, Jesus Guerrero, who rented them a P.A. for fifty bucks after giving them a half-hour lecture on the evils of rock-n-roll.

February 1990 -- Thomas is told by the high school nurse, "I'm sorry, honey, but I'm not allowed to give you any aspirin, but if you call your mom, she can bring you some." Thomas is in his second year of teaching at the time.

March 1990 -- First Hey Zeus album, "Call Your Mom" is released.

August 1994 -- Thomas quits band and teaching and moves to L.A. to begin working for Channel One. On his first day, he's given extensive lessons on the coffee maker. Begins to suspect he's taken a career misstep. Inspired by sheer boredom, Thomas begins working on his first novel.

March 1995 -- Thomas completes "Rats Saw God," begins sending it to literary agents.

June 12, 1995, 12:15 p.m. -- A literary agent offers to represent Thomas.

June 12, 1995, 12:17 p.m. -- Thomas quits job at Channel One. Announces he's moving back to Texas.

October 1995 -- Simon & Schuster buys "Rats Saw God" and Thomas' unfinished second novel, "Slave Day." Thomas blows advance check at Dunkin' Donuts.

June 1997 -- Thomas offered staff writing job on "Dawson's Creek." Moves back to Los Angeles. His scripted line, "No applause, just throw lingerie" is changed to "No applause, just throw money." Begins to suspect he's taken a career misstep.

May 1998 -- ABC orders "Cupid" to series. Thomas demands a larger dressing room.

Thomas is a dues-paying member of the Writers'

Guild, the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators as well as the Austin Writer's League.

## Contact Information

Click here to email Rob. Thomas is represented by Ari Greenburg at Endeavor Literary and Talent Agency. Direct all professional inquiries to his agent. Author appearances handled by Cheryl Herman at Simon & Schuster. For press materials, contact Suzanne Murphy at Simon & Schuster.

Photo by Stanley Hensley.  
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## ABOUT GARY PAULSEN

Born May 17, 1939, Gary Paulsen is one of America's most popular writers for young people. Although he was never a dedicated student, Paulsen developed a passion for reading at an early age. After a librarian gave him a book to read--along with his own library card--he was hooked. He began spending hours alone in the basement of his apartment building, reading one book after another.



On Tour with Gary Paulsen

Running away from home at the age of 14 and traveling with a carnival, Paulsen acquired a taste for adventure. A youthful summer of rigorous chores on a farm; jobs as an engineer, construction worker, ranch hand, truck driver, and sailor; and two rounds of the 1,180-mile Alaskan dog sled race, the Iditarod; have provided ample material from which he creates his powerful stories.

Paulsen's realization that he would become a writer came suddenly when he was working as a satellite technician for an aerospace firm in California. One night he walked off the job, never to return. He spent the next year in Hollywood as a magazine proofreader, working on his own writing every night. Then he left California and drove to northern Minnesota where he rented a cabin on a lake; by the end of the winter, he had completed his first novel.

Living in the remote Minnesota woods, Paulsen eventually turned to the sport of dog racing, and entered the 1983 Iditarod. In 1985, after running the Iditarod for the second time, he suffered an attack of angina and was forced to give up his dogs. "I started to focus on writing the same energies and efforts that I was using with dogs. So we're talking 18-, 19-, 20-hour days completely committed to work. Totally, viciously, obsessively committed to work, the way I'd run dogs....I still work that way, completely,

all the time. I just work. I don't drink, I don't fool around, I'm just this way....The end result is there's a lot of books out there."

It is Paulsen's overwhelming belief in young people that drives him to write. His intense desire to tap deeply into the human spirit and to encourage readers to observe and care about the world around them has brought him both enormous popularity with young people and critical acclaim from the children's book community. Paulsen is a master storyteller who has written more than 175 books and some 200 articles and short stories for children and adults. He is one of the most important writers of young adult literature today and three of his novels--*Hatchet*, *Dogsong*, and *The Winter Room*--were Newbery Honor Books. His books frequently appear on the best books lists of the American Library Association.

Paulsen has received many letters from readers (as many as 200 a day) telling him they felt Brian Robeson's story in *Hatchet* was left unfinished by his early rescue, before the winter came and made things really tough. They wanted to know what would happen if Brian were not rescued, if he had to survive in the winter. Paulsen says, "Since my life has been one of survival in winter--running two Iditarods, hunting and trapping as a boy and young man--the challenge became interesting, and so I researched and wrote *Brian's Winter*, showing what could and perhaps would have happened had Brian not been rescued."

Paulsen and his wife, Ruth Wright Paulsen, an artist who has illustrated several of his books, divide their time between a home in New Mexico and a boat in the Pacific.

Photo of Gary Paulsen © copyright Tim Keating.



KAREN HESSE

**ADDRESSES:** *Home*—Star Route, Williamsville, VT 362. *Agent*—Barbara Kouts, P.O. Box 558, Bellport, NY 11713.

**CAREER:** Writer, 1969—. Leave benefit coordinator for the University of Maryland, 1975-76; worked variously as a teacher, a librarian, an advertising secretary, a typesetter, and a proofreader. Affiliated with Mental Health Care and Hospice, 1988—; Newfane elementary school board chair, 1989; board member of Moore Free Library, 1989-91.

**MEMBER:** Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (leader of South Vermont chapter, 1985-92).

**AWARDS, HONORS:** *Wish on A Unicorn* was named a 1992 Children's Book of Distinction by the *Hungry Mind Review*; *Letters from Rifka* was awarded the Christopher Medal and the *Horn Book Fanfare*, and was named a *School Library Journal* Best Book, a New York Public Library Book for Sharing, and a Best Book for Young Adults and a notable book by the American Library Association, all 1992; poetry awards from *Writer's Digest* and Poetry Society of Vermont.

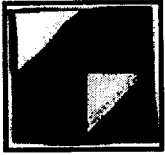
**WRITINGS:**

*Wish on a Unicorn*, Holt, 1991.

*Letters from Rifka*, Holt, 1992.

*Copyy's Chair* (picture book), illustrated by Kay Life, Macmillan, 1993.

*Lester's Dog* (picture book), illustrated by Nancy Carpenter, Crown, 1993.



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## Lois Lowry



I've always felt that I was fortunate to have been born the middle child of three. My older sister, Helen, was very much like our mother: gentle, family-oriented, eager to please. Little brother Jon was the only boy and had interests that he shared with our father; together they were always working on electric trains and erector sets, and later, they always seemed to have their heads under the raised hood of a car.

That left me in-between, and exactly where I wanted to be: on my own. I was a solitary child who lived in the world of books and my own imagination.

Because my father was a career military officer--an army dentist--I lived all over the world. I was born in Hawaii, moved from there to New York, spent the years of World War II in my mother's Pennsylvania hometown, and from there went to Tokyo when I was eleven. High school was back in New York City, but by the time I went to college (Brown University in Rhode Island), my family was living in Washington, D.C..

I married young. Women did that so often in those days. I had just had my nineteenth birthday--finished my sophomore year in college--when I married a naval officer and continued the odyssey that military life requires. California. Connecticut. Florida. South Carolina. Finally, Cambridge, Massachusetts, when my husband left the service and entered Harvard Law School; and then to Maine--by this time with four children under the age of five in tow.

My children grew up in Maine. So did I. I returned to college at the University of Southern Maine, got my degree, went to graduate school, and finally began to write professionally, the thing I had dreamed of doing since those childhood years when I had endlessly scribbled stories and poems in notebooks.

After my marriage ended in 1977, when I was forty, I settled into the life I have led ever since. Today I live and write in West Cambridge, in a house dominated by a very shaggy Tibetan Terrier named Bandit. Weekends find me in New Hampshire, where we have an early nineteenth century farmhouse surrounded by flower gardens, woods, and wildlife.

My books have varied in content and style. Yet it seems to me that all of them deal, essentially, with the same general theme: the importance of human connections. *A Summer to Die*, my first book, is a fictionalized retelling of the early death of my sister, and of the effect of such a loss on a family. *Number the Stars*, set in a different culture and era, tells of the same things: the role that we humans play in the lives of our fellow beings.

A new book, *The Giver*, takes place against the background of yet another very different culture and time. Though broader in scope than my earlier books, it nonetheless speaks to the same concern: the vital need for humans to be aware of their interdependence, not only with each other, but with the world and its environment.